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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT. FOR INL/LP, DRL/PHD, AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR PGOV KCRM KJUS PHUM ECON HO

SUBJECT: TROUBLE IN PARADISE: HONDURAN BAY ISLAND OF GUANAJA A HOT-SPOT FOR NARCOTRAFFICKING

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: The Honduran Bay Islands of Roatan, Utila, and Guanaja are well known narcotrafficking transit points and home to countless other illicit activities. Due to the large tourism industry on Roatan and Utila, the GOH has chosen to focus its limited counternarcotics resources primarily on these two islands. Guanaja, however, has not received the much needed resources to combat its ever-growing narcotics problem. The least developed of the Bay Islands, Guanaja's limited infrastructure and services have served to be a deterrent to tourism. Additionally, unemployment is widespread, creating a safehaven on Guanaja for narcotraffickers and organized crime families. Drug abuse among the 6,000 islanders has greatly increased and all indications suggest that this trend will continue. END SUMMARY

¶12. (U) The Honduran Bay Islands of Roatan, Utila, and Guanaja are well known narcotrafficking transit points and home to countless other illicit activities. Roughly 85 percent of Guanaja's adult population uses crack, cocaine, or marijuana according to a recent El Heraldo newspaper report. Casual drug use can be observed openly in public, and even children as young as 8 years old are known to be regular drug users. The widespread usage of illegal substances may be due to the high unemployment rate on the island. Tourism also remains depressed and the fishing industry is not at a sustainable level for many families to subsist on. Thus, some people have found employment with the narcotraffickers and are often paid in the form of drugs rather than cash, creating a cycle of drug abuse.

¶13. (U) Honduras is not usually the ultimate destination for narcotrafficking transactions, but rather a transit point. Much of the product that transits through Guanaja originates in South America and is destined for the Cayman Islands and the United States. The most common means of transportation in the area of Guanaja is maritime, although planes are also used. Drug runners use 200 horsepower boats that easily surpass the 100 horsepower boats used by the Honduran police and Navy. It is common for abandoned packages and boats to be found near Guanaja when the traffickers are alerted of the presence of authorities. This in turn makes prosecution highly difficult and unlikely.

¶14. (U) The narcotraffickers are protected by the inhabitants of Guanaja through methods of terror and assault. Also, the undersupported police authorities of the island do not have the manpower to patrol, capture, and prosecute known traffickers. According to the Director of National Police, Coralia Rivera, the effectiveness of the police force is minimized because they need boats, planes, and helicopters to enforce narcotrafficking laws, and these resources are just not available.

¶15. (SBU) COMMENT: In a recent letter to the Ambassador, the Mayor of Guanaja pleaded for some form of direct U.S. counternarcotics assistance to combat the presence of drug traffickers. There are recent reports that a fed-up local population, acting in a vigilante-style campaign, attacked and destroyed the house of a well known drug trafficker. Until more resources become available to law enforcement agencies in Guanaja, the island will remain very vulnerable to the corruption of crime bosses and influential narcotraffickers. Furthermore, much of its population will continue to support such activities both through the use of narcotics and the protection they provide to the traffickers. This problem is not just that of a small island of 6,000 inhabitants, but indicative of the larger problem Honduras faces as more and more of its territory is compromised by the drug trade. Post believes that additional USG counternarcotics resources should be directed at areas like Guanaja in order to fight the larger war on drugs. END COMMENT

Palmer